

**MORE THAN EGGS
ETERNAL LIFE NOW
ROMANS 6:1-12
APRIL 14, 2013**

A very sick man had received bad news from his doctor.

He asked his doctor,

“Doctor, I am afraid to die.

Tell me what lies on the other side.”

Quietly, the doctor said, “I don't know.”

“You don't know?”

You're, a Christian man, and don't know what's on the other side?”

The doctor was rattled the handle of the door.

On the other side came a sound of scratching and whining.

As he opened the door, a dog sprang into the room

and leaped on him, his tail wagging and licking him.

Turning to the patient, the doctor said,

“Did you notice my dog?

He's never been in this room before.

On the rare occasion that I bring him to the office, when my day will be short,

I don't bring him into examination rooms.

He didn't know what was in here.

He knew nothing except that his master was here.

And when the door opened, he sprang in without fear.

I know only a little of what is on the other side of death.

But I do know one thing.

I know my Master is there, and that is enough.”

Easter is about more than eggs.

It's about the resurrection of Jesus,

and the fact that Jesus opened the door to the other side for all who would follow him.

One of the great gifts of God to us is the promise of resurrection and life after death.

The reality of Easter is not just for one day a year of the biggest crowds in church.

Easter, and all that it promises is true all the time.

The resurrection of Jesus means that those who follow him in life

will follow him into life after death.

We may not fully appreciate that fact

when we are young,

when we are healthy,

when the people we are close to are young and healthy...

basically, when we are not having to face the reality of death.

But as we get older, when health is compromised, when loved ones are older or ill,

we appreciate it more.

Jesus died and rose again.

And because of him, the gates to eternal life after death are open to us.

But one of the things we may also not fully appreciate is that

he also offers us eternal life right here and now.

Not eternity as duration, but as quality, richness, depth.

The apostle Paul insisted on the reality of the bodily resurrection of Jesus,

and insisted on God's promise that those who follow Jesus will follow him into resurrection.

But he made the point, more than once,

that it's not just a promise of eternal life after death.

It's also a promise of new life, eternal life, NOW.

ROMANS 6:1-12

“Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?”

A pastor in Las Vegas answered his phone and heard,
 “I'm in Las Vegas for a few days and wondered when your Sunday service is.”
 The pastor said, “I'm impressed.
 Most people who come to Vegas don't come to go to church.
 The man said, “Oh, I didn't come to go to church.
 I came for the gambling, drinking and wild women.
 But if I have half as much fun as I'm planning,
 I'll need a church on Sunday morning.”

Is that the intent of God's forgiveness?

Hardly!

There were some in the early church who suggest that,
 since Paul says we are saved by grace through faith,
 apart from works of the law,
 we can just go on sinning.

It's OK, because I'm forgiven and saved.

We know from Paul's letters there were
 some people in the church in Corinth who were even visiting prostitutes,
 and one guy who sleeping with his step-mother.
 They may have even bragged about it!

But before we look down on them,
 we ought to take a close look in the mirror.
 Have you ever minimized the sinfulness of something you did or wanted to do
 because “God will forgive me”?

Paul tackles this with language that is quite different from what we're used to.

He writes about being “in Christ.”

I am “in Christ,” so whatever happened to him happened to me.
 Baptized into Christ, baptized into his death,
 buried with him, united with him in death, united with him in his resurrection.

He talks about this almost like it's a geographic location.

It's like saying “We will remain in France,”
 with the assumption that we will therefore continue to speak French.
 If we remain in sin, we therefore keep on doing sinful things.
 Paul's argument is that we have been moved out of that country,
 so we should no longer speak that language.
 We have been removed from the domain of sin,
 our citizenship in that domain is surrendered,
 so we should not keep on doing sinful things.

Paul does not say it's impossible for a believer to sin.

You know from your own experience that's not true.

You probably tripped up more than once before you got here this morning.
 You just don't want to talk about it.

In Romans 7 Paul talks about his own inner struggle between good and evil, righteousness and sin.

“What I want to do, I do not do,
 but what I hate I do.

What I do is not the good I want to do;

no, the evil I do not want to do – this I keep on doing.”

(Ro.7:15, 19)

Paul does not paint a fictional fantasy of a Christian life unmarked by sin,
because he knows the struggle with temptation personally.

The Letter of James tells believers, believers!,

to confess their sins to one another, and so find healing.

(Jas.5:16)

Paul knows, James knows, God knows that temptation is still tempting!

It is not impossible for a believer to sin.

But, Paul says, it is morally incongruous.

And it is not an inevitability against which we are powerless.

Paul insists that God's grace not only forgives our sins,

but also delivers us from the power of sin and the inevitability of sinning.

Grace does more than justify,

delivering forgiveness of sins.

Grace also sanctifies,

makes us more holy, more Christ-like.

And all this Paul wraps up in the meaning of baptism.

He says water baptism is a picture of our union with Christ.

The early church had a vivid practice of baptism.

The baptismal candidate would come to the water and disrobe,
symbolizing the death of their old life.

They would be immersed,

symbolizing their burial.

They would come up out of the water,

a picture of rising to new life.

And a new white robe would be put on them,

a reminder that they were putting on new life in Christ.

Water baptism is a means of grace.

God shows up and moves in powerful ways.

Water baptism points to what God is working on in our lives.

But God does not turn us into puppets.

Imagine a man who wants a woman to be his.

He decides to take her by force,

physically dragging her up the aisle,

forcing her to say, "I do,"

shoving her in the trunk of his car

and driving off to an isolated place to consummate their marriage.

We'd call that rape.

It happens in some primitive cultures,

including fundamentalist Islam.

But God does not work that way toward us.

He seeks our willing response to his grace, our cooperation with his purposes.

He seeks our faith, our trust, our answer to his call.

And not only our response in one moment of one day,

but every moment of every day,

continually and repeatedly choosing to die to our old sinful life,

and live our new life in Christ.

That's why it is so important that we remember our baptism and all that it means.

Verse 3 goes straight to that.

"Don't you know" what your baptism means?

Don't you remember?

Did you forget?

Imagine a new bride

horrified to see her new husband flirting with young women at the wedding reception.

You can hear her words,

“Have you forgotten what you said to me?

The promises you made?

What about that ring on your finger?”

John Stott wrote, “Can a married woman live as though she was still single?

Well, yes, I suppose she could.

It is not impossible.

But let her remember who she is.

Let her feel her wedding ring, the symbol of her new life of union with her husband,

and she will want to live accordingly.

Can a born-again Christian live as though they were still in their sins?

Well, yes, I suppose they could, at least for a while.

It is not impossible.

But let them remember who they are.

Let them recall their baptism,

the symbol of their new life of union with Christ,

and they will want to live accordingly...

Regenerate Christians should no more contemplate a return to unregenerate living

than adults to their childhood,

married people to their singleness,

or discharged prisoners to their prison cell.

For our union with Jesus Christ has severed us from the old life

and committed us to the new.

Our baptism stands between the two like a door between two rooms,

closing on the one and opening into the other.

We have died, and we have risen.

How can we possibly live again in what we have died to?”

(John Stott, *The Message of Romans*)

Paul says all this in the language of geographic location.

The key words in these verses are “in” and “into”

We are in Christ,

we were baptized into Christ,

into his death, into his burial, into his resurrection.

This is your location.

You are no longer in the land of sin and death,

so now you must speak a different language and live a different life.

If you are in a relationship with Jesus, united with Christ, or “in Christ,”

the old sinful you died on the cross.

The penalty for sin was paid.

Then, Paul says in verse 4, “We too may live in new life.”

In the original Greek that’s not in a simple future tense.

It is in what’s called a “present-continuing tense.”

We can have ew life starting now and going on forever.

There is certainly a future tense, a resurrection after death.

But, Paul insists in verse 11,

“Count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.”

Present tense “alive to God.”

Right now.

A little taste of resurrection life, eternal life, right now.

We walk in resurrection already, now, and live in anticipation of the future reality.

There are both “already” and “not yet” qualities to resurrection and eternal life.

We find this articulated throughout John’s Gospel, too.

“Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life.” (Jn.3:36)

Has eternal life, present tense.

“The water I give them will become in them
a spring of water welling up to eternal life.” (Jn.4:14)

Jesus is saying the Holy Spirit brings to believers eternal life, now.

“The one who believes has eternal life.” (Jn.6:47)

Has, present tense.

“Now this is eternal life:
that they know you, the only true God,
and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.” (Jn.17:3)

Notice that Jesus did not say:

Eternal life is dying and going to heaven.

No, eternal life is knowing God, knowing Jesus.

Not knowing about, but knowing, as in a relationship.

And it is present tense,

eternal life now.

Max Lucado describes it this way.

“Of all the names I’ve been called, no one has ever accused me of being a neat freak.

Not that my mom didn’t try.

And not that she didn’t succeed.

As long as I was under her roof, I stacked my plate and picked up my shorts.

But once I was free, I was free indeed.

I was slow to see the logic of neatness.

Why make up a bed if you are going to sleep in it again tonight?

Is anything gained by putting the lid on the toothpaste tube tonight
only to remove it again tomorrow?

Life is too short to match your socks; just buy longer pants.

I got married.

Denalyn was so patient.

She said she didn’t mind my habits... if I didn’t mind sleeping outside.

Since I did, I began to change.

I enrolled in a 12 step program for slob.

(‘My name is Max, I hate to vacuum.’)

A physical therapist helped me rediscover the muscles used for hanging shirts.

My nose was reintroduced to the fragrance of Pine Sol.

I could go three days without throwing a sock behind the couch.

But then came the moment of truth.

Denalyn went out of town for a week.

Initially I reverted to the old man.

I figured I’d be a slob for six days and clean on the seventh.

But something strange happened, a curious discomfort.

I couldn’t relax with dirty dishes in the sink.

When I saw an empty potato-chip sack on the floor

I – hang on to your hat – bent over and picked it up!
 I actually put my bath towel back on the rack.
 What had happened to me?
 Simple.
 I'd been exposed to a higher standard.
 Isn't that what has happened with us?
 Isn't that the heart of Paul's argument?
 How could we who have been freed from sin
 return to it?
 Before Christ our lives were out of control, sloppy, and indulgent.
 We didn't even know we were slobs until we met him.
 Then he moved in.
 Things began to change.
 Suddenly we find ourselves wanting to do good.
 Go back to the old mess?
 Are you kidding?"

(Max Lucado, In the Grip of Grace)

Would you go back to the old mess?

Scriptures cited: Ro.6:1-12; 7:15, 19; Jas.5:16; Jn.3:36; 4:14; 6:47; 17:3